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RETHINKING THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

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Seeing the Enemy (or Not)

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No matter how much money we expend in our quest for “information dominance,” “persistent surveillance,” and the like, we often end up understanding precious little about the non-Western adversaries or competitors we face. There are at least four sets of reasons for this: technology offers less of a solution than we presume; our values and ideals blind us to certain realities about others’ values and ideals; our military, simply by virtue of being a military, is organized to excel at “conventional” war; and we are too inconsistent regarding the study of our own history, never mind other cultures.

Of course, some might argue that these attributes are precisely the things that helped us beat non-Westerners in the past. Others might insist these are the same instruments of power being wielded to great effect in Afghanistan and Iraq today. But note what else was integral to our successes, historically speaking: the absence of any deeply nuanced military-wide understanding of the enemy. To succeed in the past, we didn’t have to have the sort of small-unit cultural awareness that is being trumpeted today.

So, one obvious question this chapter should raise is: Do we really need such knowledge now? A second, more academic set of questions is: What past are we referring to? and Which non-Westerners?¹ Throughout the Cold War era we won very few hot wars. Indeed, World War II marks the last time we could claim a clear victory over non-Western adversaries. Presumably, then, something, somewhere along the line must have changed. But what: the nature of war, our position in the world, or our adversaries’ relations to us?

To answer such questions requires tacking back and forth between “us” and “them,” and “then” and “now.” In the process, it also seems useful to

wonder whether we are constitutionally capable of understanding non-Westerners—never mind whether we *should* understand them. Worth examining too is the extent to which we sufficiently understand ourselves. Loren Baritz, for one, began asking questions like this after Vietnam.² What I want to push us to consider are the strategic implications. If we are deficient, then do we retool to overcome our traditional weaknesses, or work hard to make the most of our traditional strengths? These represent radically different alternatives. And while the safe bet might be to blend them, that would require tremendous finesse on the one hand and considerable stick-to-itiveness on the other—two attributes that we Americans often have in short supply. Nevertheless, because we tend toward optimism, I can't help but offer some interim suggestions.

Some Definitional Issues

First, who and what should “non-Western” refer to? Ask a political scientist or economist, and “non-Western” might still apply to spaces on the map, to non-capitalist economies, and to states that lack a certain style of government. Traditionally, “non-Western” has amounted to a default category used to describe everyone and everything outside the West: all those places and spaces apart from Western Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. For anyone with an anthropological bent, however, the West itself is a highly problematic concept. What of American Indians, aborigines, and Maoris (or gypsies and Saami for that matter); should they count as Westerners or non-Westerners? Is Israel Western or non-Western? What about South Africa? Or, for those not bothered by the racial undertones of white West vs. non-white non-West, what about military historians' recent accounts extolling the virtues of Western “ways of war”? What were Hitler's storm troopers—Western or non-Western? And to which category should we assign Red armies? As for Soviet Russians, are Slavs Western or Eastern, and if they are Eastern, should they be considered *as* Eastern as the Chinese or Japanese?

One could split hairs like this for pages. The point is that labels like non-Western can all too easily obfuscate more than they reveal. Certainly at this point in time, when warlords hailing from “failed” states do cell phone business with multinational corporations three continents away, the old connotations by which the non-West was regarded as “backward and primitive” hardly pertain. Even for those portions of the non-West that remain tribal in outlook, alle-

giance, and organization, we'd be foolish not to acknowledge how sophisticated tribes can be. While people who belong to tightly knit local associations—tribes, clans, secret societies, or religious brotherhoods, among others—are more likely to prefer doing business person-to-person rather than by the book, so too do criminals, insurgents, and terrorists. This is one nexus that should concern us.

A second reason we should worry is that non-Western communities can now be found everywhere: Amsterdam, Hamburg, Lackawanna County, Washington, D.C. Instead of geography being the defining feature of the non-West, how people operate, with whom they interact, and why better describes the dichotomy:

| <i>West</i> | <i>Non-West</i> |
|--|--|
| Individuals matter more than groups; the law protects individuals | Groups (family, tribe, religion) matter more than individuals; government and law are not trusted; the group protects the individual |
| Print and electronic media are dense and diverse; rumors and misinformation can be dispelled | Print and electronic media are thin; rumors and misinformation may be impossible to dispel |
| Bureaucracy works | Bureaucracy is personalized and inconsistent |
| Economic relations are governed by the state; commercial transactions are formal | Economic relations are often informal; commercial transactions are informal ³ |

In the non-Western frame, people rely on systems of trust and not the rule of law, person-to-person ties and not a formal structure, and methods of communicating, banking, and doing business beyond the purview of state authorities. That such modes don't leave much of a paper or electron trail is just one of the difficulties we've discovered post-9/11. But the fact that some individuals are able to shift back and forth between these two frames poses more than just forensic problems. How do we monitor their activities, anticipate their next moves, counter them, preempt them, or catch them before an event if we're in a Western frame and they operate by non-Western rules?

This ability to operate in two radically different systems—which they manage, but we (for legal and other reasons) eschew—is not as new as we might suppose. Individual Cherokee, Delaware, Seneca, Huron, and countless

others moved back and forth between non-Western village life and Western cities as early as the 1700s. In fact, were we only to pay more attention to our own interactions with the non-Westerners we've been interacting with longest—namely, American Indians—we would learn some interesting lessons. That we don't is a point I will return to. For now, let me introduce them as a foil in this discussion. Two things can be said about many of the Indians who operated across the seams at the outset of American history: they fully appreciated and respected Anglo-America's overwhelming military strength. Indeed, part of the government's strategy behind inviting so many chiefs and others to visit their Great White Father was to try to impress them too. But for that particular subset of literate, white-acting Indians whom whites could accept as civilized, the more seriously they felt themselves being taken, the more this convinced them they *would* be able to reach an accommodation with the government on behalf of their tribes. Ironically, it didn't take intimate familiarity with Anglo-American ways to convince large numbers of other Indians that the more whites there were, moving onto their lands, the more of a threat Anglo-America posed—and the more whites needed to be *opposed*, not solicited. The catch is that the uncivilized Indians who understood this best understood least about their adversary's (meaning "our") potential weaknesses.

Encounters with Indians

The question of who understood whom better in Indian-white encounters is highly suggestive. Arguably, Indians who rejected acculturation out of hand understood what they thought they needed to about whites. Whites were encroaching, invading, and greedy. White values were incompatible with theirs. What more did they need to learn?

What these Indians didn't sufficiently appreciate was the nature of the American state, the inner workings of government, or the nuances of domestic politics. They couldn't identify how they might have been able to exert potential leverage or how to exploit latent, even blatant fissures. And it's not as though there weren't exploitable fissures. At the height of the Indian Wars in the West (1846–90), for instance, the same sorts of tensions between hawks and doves existed as do now. There was media sensationalism. There were humanitarian do-gooders. There were opportunists. Even contractors (in the form of settlers) could be found on the battlefield.

What, meanwhile, did whites understand about Indians? They recognized that there were different tribes, and even factions within tribes. They also understood Indians' material weaknesses, which they sought to take advantage of by plying them with trade goods and whiskey. But did they understand Indian values? Could they accurately identify the glue that held tribes together? Or could they account for why leaders like Osceola, Crazy Horse, Captain Jack of the Modocs, or Geronimo would so willingly fight in order to die *as* warriors?

In many regards, Indians offer a premier example of non-state actors who fought to preserve their identity, but who—by doing so, and in seeking to defend their autonomy—invariably wound up too splintered and disunited. What, after all, tied all Indians together except their opposition to whites? Nothing really, considering that Indians were communally organized and locally oriented. Only after tribal integrity itself had been shattered—only after groups of Creeks, Seneca, or Sioux (to cite just three groups) found themselves subdivided into nativist and accommodationist camps—did new syncretic pan-Indian movements gain momentum. But by then it was almost always too late.

Another difficulty for Indians was that the vanguard of the invasion was similarly splintered. Too often it was settlers and not the army that moved into and through Indian lands. This made it far too easy for Indians to respond in piecemeal fashion, killing families here or there to terrorize all whites into fleeing an area. But random violence, no matter how temporarily effective, never staved the flow. Also, the fact that it was endless streams of whites pushing the frontier forward meant Indians would have had to somehow pierce through these waves before they reached the heart of the state itself. Small wonder that the groups we remember fighting hardest rarely came to understand how the United States worked. Either they had enough to deal with just defending their homelands, or the areas into which they retreated—the Everglades, the Chiricahuas, the Lava Beds, even the Northern Plains—were so far removed from the seat(s) of white power that white machinations could only have remained opaque.

This should already hint at a major contrast between then and now.

At the same time, Indians suffered a host of other disadvantages. Demographically they would have been swamped even if scourges of smallpox and cholera hadn't swept away entire communities, thereby rearranging the local balance of power just as whites showed up. In the same way that diseases stole

a march on settlers, so did horses and guns. The extent to which Indians became dependent on other nonnative products remains debatable. Arguably, dependence didn't become debilitating until local subsistence bases had been so eroded Indians were left with no choice. Choice—in many ways—is the operative word. Whenever they had a choice, significant numbers of Indians preferred to remain Indian.

What did staying Indian mean? The easy answer is: different things to different peoples. Take Modocs, for instance.⁴ What made a Modoc a Modoc and not a white man would have been a subset of the same things that made a Modoc a Modoc and not a Klamath. Just before the Modoc War, Modocs in northern California looked thoroughly acculturated: they wore manufactured clothes, many worked for ranchers or miners, and they responded to Anglo names. Yet, they fled the Klamath Reservation in 1870, demanding their own. Why? One answer is they wanted to be able to be Modoc together; even if they were already enmeshed in the broader American economy as individuals, they drew their identity from being able to remain Modoc with other Modoc. Modoc would have agreed among themselves about what being Modoc meant; this is part of what set them apart. But just because Modoc were fiercely attached to their own identity didn't mean they all agreed about what they should do to save themselves. Neither did all Sioux (not everyone followed Sitting Bull into Canada). Nor did all Nez Perce follow Chief Joseph.

Before exploring the significance of corporate identity for non-Western peoples, there is one more critical set of comparisons to make. Large numbers of Americans were infused with a crusading spirit. They penetrated Indian lands; the reverse never occurred. And when whites moved in they generally did so for keeps. Settlers strove, always, to improve their lot. When they fought—or egged the army into fighting on their behalf—they did so for the sake of property. Land was to be farmed, let, or sold; no matter what was done with it, it was worth money. When Indians fought with Indians, by contrast, they rarely did so over land or money. Intertribal warfare was usually waged for individual glory, portable booty, or captives—not fixed, improvable property.

In other words, what whites were used to fighting for (and over) was radically different from what Indians typically sought. Whites and Indians organized differently, planned differently, and executed operations differently. At the tactical level, Indians were often ingenious and highly successful. But the nature of tribal society made fielding, commanding, and controlling permanent armies next to impossible. As non-state actors confronting a state,

Indians didn't possess the wherewithal to overcome the organizational and logistical disparities between soldiers and themselves. Again, too, with no direct experience of a state, they couldn't possibly begin to understand how the systems arrayed against them fit (or didn't fit) together.

The same can't be said for our current adversaries.

It is hard, actually, to imagine how the United States wouldn't have steamrolled Indians. The asymmetries we can measure were stacked entirely in our favor. But therein also lays the germ of a problem that makes our experiences with Indians far less remote than we might imagine. The fact that we could beat Indians without sufficiently understanding the nature of their attachments or the inner workings of their societies means we never had to develop these skills. Again, our numbers, technical abilities, and organizational capacity precluded us from having to. So did our inheritance.

One thing that is often cited to explain American exceptionalism is that we inherited a blessed geography: a large, richly resourced region straddling the temperate zone and protected by two vast oceans. What is seldom remarked is a second critical asymmetry. Legions of Indians had already experienced the French and then the British (in the Northeast and upper Midwest), or the Spanish then the British (in the Southeast). When faced with multiple sets of players who sought tribal alliances, Indians demonstrated just how strategically astute and sophisticated they could be. They would have been utterly familiar with competition that involved attracting and keeping followers or allies and playing both sides against the middle, since such maneuvering was just as integral to their politicking as anyone else's. We shouldn't be fooled, then, into assuming Indians *couldn't* think strategically. Instead, it was sole proprietorship that threw them for a loop. That's what the United States represented. Once Indians lost the opportunity to dicker with representatives from different empires, they lost strategic depth. Sole proprietorship was an alien concept. They couldn't have known how to understand this. Nor would they have understood why they needed to.

Ethnographic Intelligence

We can find similar encounters on every continent. Wherever unitary powers bore down on tribal peoples, tribes ended up encapsulated, co-opted, absorbed, or marginalized; tribes rarely came out on top in war. At the same time, they never entirely disappeared. If they had, "non-Western" couldn't be applied to any of the attributes or means of operating mentioned earlier.

Two additional ironies are worth noting. Dynasties, not tribes, ruled the empires that conquered large swathes of the non-West (think Hapsburgs, Ottomans, Spain, England, France, etc.), yet empires invariably granted tribes far more leeway than did states. But then, with the breakup of empires, many institutions of state (particularly in Africa) have come to be run by tribes. This too should underscore the resilience of communal attachments and hint at how superficial the West's impact has been at the grassroots.

We know from colonial history that the British, especially, preferred employing indirect rule whenever and wherever possible. To do so required keeping local political arrangements intact, which in turn meant understanding how they operated. Here is where anthropology is often blamed as the handmaiden of colonialism. Without question, social anthropology in Britain largely concentrated on understanding social relations, social structure, methods of local organization, and social control—precisely those things the British would have needed to identify, and ultimately manipulate, loci of power in the non-Western world. But to argue as though the British weren't already adept at acquiring this sort of knowledge is ludicrous. Not only were the first Englishmen into an area usually traders or missionaries (not anthropologists), the name of the game for them was to beat the competition—whether foreign, regional, or local. This meant figuring out how to win friends and influence people and thwart rivals all in one. To succeed, they had to insinuate themselves into local alliances and allegiances. As singletons or small teams, they certainly couldn't afford to apply force. Finesse (and sometimes armed finesse), yes. But also their initial aim wouldn't have been social control. Instead it was market penetration (to make money, or converts, or both).

It only stands to reason, then, that the British imperial experience led to a different set of competencies from our foundational encounters with Indians. This may also help explain why we never adopted any of Britain's best practices. We were never consistent about what we really wanted of, for, or from Indians even as we engaged them—sequestration, assimilation, or preservation. Perhaps because our aim was to push Indians aside and/or pen them up, not govern them to some extractive economic or geostrategic ends, we never institutionalized a coherent post-conflict approach either, no matter how many Indian wars we fought. Much as with development economics today—where first export promotion, then import substitution, followed by structural adjustment, and now good governance have been pushed on developing countries—policy makers were happy to try whatever scheme the “experts” came up with next.

Unlike the British, we didn't develop an Indian Civil Service. Worse, we didn't attempt to systematically develop expertise of any sort. Granted, India was Britain's crown jewel. But even for some place like the Sudan, where Britain had no real commercial interests yet clear security concerns, the British managed to post 120 or so field officers to the Sudan Political Service, most recruited from Oxford and Cambridge. Responsible for administering a population of between 9 and 10 million, these individuals excelled at understanding how different societies were organized, knowing who was whom, how they were related, what their relationships consisted of, etc.⁵ They typically paid close attention to kinship, especially in acephalous (or governmentless) societies where genealogies double as charts of trustworthiness. They also tried to figure out what went on in healing cults, religious brotherhoods, and local gatherings of all types. In short, they produced and consumed ethnographic intelligence in prodigious quantities, something one would think we'd recognize we need today if we hope to understand anything about our adversaries' means of recruiting, fundraising, or planning and executing operations, all of which piggyback on indigenous (and thus latent) means of association.⁶

As necessary as ethnographic intelligence is, it alone is hardly sufficient, however. Information does not constitute or even always contribute to understanding. To get at motivation, for example, takes more than mapping who is related to whom. The British could well afford to concentrate on the political aspects of native life. Given the imperial task of maintaining socio-political control, what community meant, how it felt, and why it mattered were immaterial. Nor did we Americans have to delve into the murk of Indians' values, ideals, or beliefs so long as we could win our wars through attrition. But, is control possible today? Are we willing to engage in wars of conquest or attrition?⁷

Since the answers to these questions appear to be “no,” and since non-Westerners are in our midst and not just “out there” somewhere, logic dictates that we not only try to figure out how people associate, but also why they make the choices they do. Why do some accept some of our values and reject others? What should go without saying is that non-Westerners wouldn't be non-Westerners if they did share our same values: they'd be us. Or they'd be fighting to become just like us. But wanting to be us has seldom turned anyone into our adversaries. Rather, most often people have fought us in order to remain themselves (even when this includes getting stuff from us for themselves)—all of which brings us back to issues of identity and autonomy.

Identity Issues

It may be too much of a truism to point out that people generally fight to improve or protect their security.⁸ In the United States we tend to take it for granted that our individual security, as well as our future social welfare security, are protected by the state. People who can't count on the (or a) state generally fall back on networks they know they can trust, which makes trust paramount and communal or corporate identity key. For many peoples as well, psychic or spiritual security is tied to communal attachments; obligations to kin carry moral weight; separations we make between the living and the dead and their effects on well-being are just that—separations *we* make. These are just some of the reasons why when people feel their sense of identity is threatened, they react as if their security is at stake.

The tricky thing is identity is not equally deep-rooted or fixed for everyone. Across cultures it doesn't attach to the same things, nor does it attach people to the same things. It isn't even located in the same place. This last might seem an odd assertion, but where is the soul located? Different peoples point to different places: the liver, the stomach, the heart. Identity is not dissimilar.

For instance, in Japan identity has long attached to knowing what it means to be Japanese and understanding exactly how to act in any given situation. In Germany identity has been thought to inhere in blood. In many Middle Eastern societies, identity is determined by one's patrilineage. In the United States what would we say? We'd probably point to values.

Ruth Benedict, an anthropologist who sought to understand the Japanese during World War II, doesn't directly address identity in quite this way in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, but that work does inspire the following Zen-like question: Can a Japanese be Japanese with non-Japanese? The answer Benedict suggests is no, Japanese can only be Japanese with other Japanese; otherwise, they find themselves playing tennis at a croquet match. No one else knows the rules to their game—or appreciates the skill with which they play it—so what, after a point, *is* the point?⁹

To what extent does this likewise hold true for Americans? I think most Americans, particularly those who have spent time abroad, would answer that an American among foreigners is still American. He may get homesick, but this doesn't erode or imperil his sense of his own identity or his confidence that, even as a lone individual, he is still just as American, with values still worth projecting. It could be that this confidence is born of belonging to a

recognized superpower. The British never had an identity problem out in the colonies; otherwise, colonial rule would have been impossible. But it may also have to do with what identity attaches to, where it is located, and what it attaches *us* to. The preeminence of values is very different from the preeminence of location (or place), or of parentage, say. That is why, if we reframe these identity questions ever so slightly—to, What makes a Japanese a Japanese? What makes an American an American? What makes an Iraqi an Iraqi? or, What makes a Kurd a Kurd?—it should be evident that it is not the same things in all cases. The message this, in turn, should convey is simpler still: everyone *isn't* just like us.

Unfortunately, the fact that anyone can become an American leads us to assume that everyone *is* just like us, they just haven't been able to become one of us yet. It also leads us to presume that our values are universal human values. Just liberate and educate people elsewhere, grant them the same kinds of opportunities we have, and they should act increasingly American.¹⁰ Immigration proves this to us every day. It also helps render us unreconstructable solipsists. With the best of intentions, we firmly believe "we are the world."

The problem is that at least some of what we stand for disgusts people elsewhere. This is especially true for Islamists, who aren't fueled solely or even largely by envy, no matter how much we might like to think so. Rather, to many devout Muslims our values are completely antithetical to theirs, and they want no part of our exporting, let alone proselytizing, our morality. What is sadly ironic about this is that we recognize how impossible it is to reach a satisfactory compromise over moral issues like abortion, euthanasia, or stem cell research here at home, yet we push an agenda abroad that includes gender equity, despite the fact that it—like abortion for many of our citizens—is considered not just wrong by many Muslims, but a threat to the entire community.

Because, meanwhile, we adopt a solipsistic attitude toward others, whenever we try to put ourselves in others' shoes it tends to be as individuals. After disasters (especially natural disasters), we are among the most giving people on earth; we can't help but feel for people who are hurt, hungry, sick, or poor. But that's because we relate to them as fellow human beings. Only when we stereotype are we likely to regard others as members of groups first and as individuals second. Thus, it is extremely difficult for us to appreciate that some peoples preferentially regard themselves as belonging to groups first, with the group deserving commitment way beyond what we would regard as more rational commitment to self.

Yet, this explains the actions of individuals like Captain Jack, a Modoc leader who sought to preserve peace between Modocs and whites in northern California during the late 1860s and early 1870s, and only reluctantly and against his better judgment led his people to war. To be a good Modoc leader *required* him to follow the wishes of the group, no matter how much these flew in the face of common sense and contradicted his personal convictions. In tribe after tribe we find individuals who made similar choices. Something we didn't understand in the nineteenth century, and still don't in the twenty-first, is that Indian and white conceptions of what matters can differ dramatically. A trip through most reservations today should, but probably can't, drive this home. On the one hand, most reservations bear a closer resemblance to the third rather than the first world. On the other, they can exert an invisible but powerful pull on even the most urbane tribal members. It is not uncommon for members to chuck a successful life on the "outside" in order to return to what, to non-Indians, resembles a rural wasteland.¹¹ But that's because what looks poor to us offers a rich sense of connectedness to those who belong—something that, since we can't see let alone feel it, we tend to discount if not dismiss altogether.

What We Can't (or Don't) See

Connectedness reminds people who and what they are attached to, who and what they can trust, and who and what poses a threat. If we can't fully appreciate the worth of this to non-Westerners, we should at least recognize its usefulness.

Remember: extended families, lineages, clans, religious brotherhoods, and other indigenous associations represent latent networks, ideally suited for covert use by criminals, terrorists, and insurgents. Worse, they are so embedded and enmeshed that the entire social fabric would have to be destroyed before they can be dismantled. But also, people are born into them. This makes them automatically familiar and comfortable. They are resilient and robust. Not only can such networks regenerate themselves should some part be damaged or destroyed, but also the template itself can be regenerated; it is inherent everywhere that communal ties persist.

This is what we are up against today and for the foreseeable future.

Nor are we well prepared to cope. Our technology, like our analysis, suffers from our penchant to mirror image. While we are unsurpassed at using technical means for gathering intelligence on other democracies, we have been demonstrably less proficient predicting collapse or upheaval in non-

Western (and non-Western style) states—witness Iran, the former Soviet Union, even Haiti. We are worse still when access is denied—consider Iraq and North Korea. Scale this down to non-state actors and the challenges proliferate. In these cases, it is not so much access that is denied as that we've never committed the resources. We focus very little attention on university campuses, in shantytowns and slums, or along borders—places where trouble often brews. But also, it is increasingly difficult to monitor diasporas that can stretch from the Hadramaut to Houston, especially when many anti-state actors have learned the hard way that the more they use Western means of communicating (or banking), the easier it is for Western intelligence organizations to "see" what they are up to. Under such circumstances, it only makes sense for them to revert to more traditional, non-Western means—something that plays to their strengths, but also takes advantage of our limitations.

Satellites can't, after all, map moral compulsion. Also, without deep local knowledge to begin with, we cannot differentiate between normal, routine ways of doing business and suspicious activities. Finally, because non-Western means are typically person-to-person and are built on relations of *proven* trust, we can neither easily insinuate ourselves nor readily penetrate these networks on the ground. Usually we do not even attempt to do this until after groups have done something to alert us to the fact that we *should* already have been monitoring them, when generally it is too late and exponentially more difficult to do so.

Compounding our difficulties are nuanced modes of communication. Never mind local dialects, people intimately familiar with one another understand each other's euphemisms. They can speak in linguistic shorthand or cultural code. This too renders listening in from a distance that much more ineffective, and penetration (again) exceedingly difficult.

The technical means we currently possess were not only designed for a different array of adversaries, operating in clever but nonetheless predictable ways, but also for the first time in the history of modern weaponry it seems highly unlikely we will engineer or invent some kind of new device with which to devastate our opponents.¹² If technology can't help us make sense of the least Western aspects of the non-Western world, how can we develop technology to penetrate it (not that we're likely to want to acknowledge technology's shortcomings)? We love technology. This is a consequence of who we are, how we fight, what we value, and what's worked for us in the past.

We should seriously wonder, though, about the role technology *has* played in fighting non-Westerners in the past. It would seem that logistics and supply were vastly more critical—again, not something likely to work in

our favor now. But this is conjecture. Such matters merit serious study, both for the light they might shed on the possibilities, as well as for what they could reveal about our misconceptions.

The “Lessons Learned” Lesson

Other lessons we *have* collated. In every new set of engagements post-World War II—Vietnam, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq—we have discovered, after the fact, things we should have known because they’d been learned previously. What this suggests is that, though the military publishes and even distributes them, no one really learns “lessons learned.”

One could argue that all armies find themselves perpetually having to relearn lessons about low intensity conflict, irregular warfare, and counterinsurgency because no army is designed—structurally or functionally—to wage non-attrition warfare against foes who don’t fight back *in* army form. But up until recently, this also never posed us a serious threat. In all our previous wars with non-Western non-state actors, we could safely assume that though they might achieve tactical and operational surprise, they could never best us strategically. They didn’t study us strategically; they lacked access, familiarity, and resources. That is certainly no longer true, and arguably hasn’t been for some time.

Other reasons why lessons learned don’t stick could have to do with our “fix it” mentality. Soldiers are inherent problem solvers. They also prefer looking forward, not backward. Then too there is personnel churn, which guarantees few rewards and scant opportunities for building up anything approaching deep region-specific or historical knowledge. Finally, we can’t forget solipsism. This convinces us that, as Americans, we already know what to do. If operations go awry or winning people over takes longer than it should, that’s simply because we haven’t deployed our assets properly. It’s inconceivable that our methods and values—including adaptability—might not work. I don’t mean to suggest that solipsism is bad. Without it we probably wouldn’t be as egalitarian, as generous, or as optimistic as we are—traits that describe those in uniform especially. But solipsism can be costly and does blind us to certain realities. It makes “hearts and minds,” “public diplomacy,” and “strategic influence” campaigns extremely appealing since these fit with not only who we think we are as a people but also whom we think other people are.

“Hearts and minds” also sounds good. It promises a benign, humane way to wage war. The problem is it seldom works. As historian Douglas Porch has

pointed out, the French in North Africa waged great hearts and minds campaigns, but basically for domestic consumption and public relations back in France.¹³ In Vietnam and ever since, we’ve sought to borrow from the French without fully appreciating which among their methods really did work. For instance, consider this assessment: “In Morocco, the ultimate testing ground of the Lyautey method, pacification came everywhere through armed and bitter contests with resistant townsmen and tribesmen. Pacification was war, not peace. Politics and economics did little to pacify the people of Morocco’s cities or the tribes of the Middle Atlas *until* they were subdued by the threat or the use of force (emphasis added).”¹⁴ Force included, by the way, denying tribes access to pasture lands.

Alternatively, we might turn to Malaysia, *the* case that gets all the attention whenever anyone discusses hearts and minds. It is clear the British won the first Malaysian Emergency and the Malaysians won the second (and there *were* two, the second having ended in 1989) by going after “stomachs and minds”—not hearts and minds. To effectively defeat the Chinese Communists required controlling food and access to food production, not so different from the French approach to pasture lands in the Middle Atlas.

I borrow the phrase stomachs and minds from Bill Donovan, founder of the Office of Strategic Services, who in 1954 said about the situation in Southeast Asia, “It is not essentially a military matter. It is a political struggle, which must be won in the stomachs of the hungry and in the minds of the people. In Washington they think that American military might is the solution to the problem, but any intelligence man knows this is not true.”¹⁵

In point of fact, the Communists in Vietnam were promising villagers all sorts of reforms, including land reform, which implies they were addressing tangible material grievances and that the Vietnamese they were seeking to win over could be said to be already “hungry.”

If we reconsider what we Americans did when we waged our guerrilla wars, we *made* people hungry.¹⁶ We took *away* their food, their way of life, and their ability to remain self-sufficient and autonomous. Sometimes we did this consciously, as was the case when we purposely wiped out the buffalo in order to subdue Plains Indians. At other times, we simply reacted opportunistically to what was already occurring. One of the arguments Andrew Jackson made to Eastern Indians to justify their “removal” was to point out that, with game having been depleted east of the Mississippi, they could only continue being Indians by moving west of the Mississippi. He and his successors took a slightly different approach with the Seminoles, who were

intractable enough to fight three wars and were not dependent on any single food source. Troops in Florida purposely went after Seminole women and children. The rationale was that this would force the warriors to give up since, without their families, what kind of life would they be fighting for? The same was done to the Apaches. In both cases victory also required penetrating the Indians' redoubts.

Nor was it small groups of soldiers who won the Indian Wars.¹⁷ It took one-fourth of the entire standing army to hunt down forty warriors after Geronimo's last breakout. Granted, the army then wasn't as large as it is now. But even given our current precision strike capabilities, which would seem to obviate lots of men in the field, targeting itself requires precision intelligence which can only be generated by: lots of men in the field over concentrated periods of time, a few individuals in the field for considerable periods of time, or insiders who are willing to betray the group. It was the latter (Indians themselves) who were responsible for the capture of our most significant Indian foes—something relatively easy to accomplish when inter- and intra-tribal rivalries were public and well known. Again, consider the contrast with our current adversaries and what it says when, after four years, a \$25 million reward still hasn't helped us locate Osama bin Laden.

Not surprisingly, we do still prefer hiring locals to help hunt down locals. From Vietnam through Iraq we have tried to find people who can and will do our scouting for us. And though this might seem to reflect one lesson successfully learned—this, after all, is what worked to our advantage in Indian war after Indian war—it has also meant that we've never felt the need to develop deep local expertise ourselves. Arguably, we don't bother because we never intend to stay anywhere very long; our aim, after all, is to liberate not conquer. Alternatively, this could reflect American pragmatism: the fastest shortcut to figuring out a place is to hire people who already know it. But the downside is also considerable. We then don't have the knowledge we need to affect the kind of hearts and minds campaign that those who consider themselves visionary about counterinsurgency insist we should wage.

Hearts and Minds: More a Problem Than a Solution?

Unlike hearts and minds, stomachs and minds would clearly play to our strengths—in men, materiel, and technological prowess. If we were willing to engage not just in conquest but also in occupation, subjugation, and “reedu-

cation” thereafter, destroying non-Western social structures and, thus, non-Westernness wouldn't be as difficult as many might assume. As unpleasant as it is to contemplate, it is far easier to engage in wholesale destruction, to scorch the earth, and to smash local social structures, thereby forcing people to *have* to change—the hallmarks of many wars of conquest—than it is to try to encourage people to *want* to change in the wake of surgical attacks. Arguably, nondemocratic leaders have had their minds changed thanks to precision strikes. But there is scant evidence that people can be made to give up their fight on behalf of autonomy or identity this way. Yet, because such courses of action are politically and ideologically impossible today, hearts and minds—as shorthand for counterinsurgency—is bound to continue to dominate our thinking, at least in the near term.¹⁸

If we examine counterinsurgency, at least three lessons learned from past efforts are considered critical to any hope for success today: unity of effort, deep local knowledge, and a small footprint. Unfortunately, achieving any of these is considerably more problematic than seems to be recognized.

Unity of effort, for instance, refers to collapsing political and military authority in the same hands; utilizing all available instruments of power (soft, hard, diplomatic, military, financial, etc.); and coordinating, planning for, and engaging in joint and seamless operations. Basically, unity of effort requires fusion. In theory, it is difficult to imagine anyone actually opposing this. But, in practice, to attain it means getting rid of the conventional/unconventional divide for starters, something proponents of counterinsurgency themselves would object to just on principle. More significantly, it would require a complete overhaul of the entire division of labor. There is no other way to ensure that complementarity—among individuals, between units, across services, etc.—would prevail over the current ethos of competition, stovepipes, and rice bowls. But even were teamwork to be institutionalized somehow, it is unclear that status hierarchies wouldn't reassert themselves and then undermine the brave, new system.

Status hierarchies represent something different from a stovepipe problem; they are also more pernicious. Consider, for instance, Special Operations Forces (SOF). For decades, Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological Operations (PsyOps) have been treated as lesser disciplines. The status (and resource) hierarchy within SOF is direct action, unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense, then civil affairs and psychological operations. This is how resources flow: armed force trumps armed finesse trumps unarmed finesse.¹⁹ It is easy to understand why. Among other things, direct action achieves

immediate visible results, yields quantifiable measures of effectiveness, and is far more "warriorlike." Unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense are, by definition, far more protracted, open ended, and consequently messier. CA and PsyOps? Because no one is quite sure *what* they can achieve, too little confidence is placed in them, the upshot of which is they most often get called in *post-combat*. Some of this has changed in the past few years, but the status of CA and PsyOps within SOF still defies what SOF's most ardent proponents of counterinsurgency argue we need: better unity of effort *with* locals. Indeed, with that as the goal, statuses within SOF should actually be reversed. The catch is that even were CA and PsyOps to be formally granted the lead, the resources, and the manpower, the warrior/direct action bias may be too innate in soldiers and the need for soldiers to be warriors too strong in Americans for such a configuration to work, while to reorient the division of labor altogether—which is what would also be required—would take strong, unrelenting leadership.

Long-lasting leadership itself should be a *sine qua non* for unity of effort. But this is precluded by current career trajectories. The same holds for acquiring deep local knowledge, something possible only if people stay put for long periods of time and engage in serious, career-long study of their areas of responsibility. Administrators in the Sudan Political Service spent years and sometimes decades in the field. T. E. Lawrence, everyone's favorite exemplar of someone who developed deep local knowledge, began before he went to university. Or take Glubb Pasha. He spent twenty-six years with the Arab Legion, and when he was unexpectedly asked to leave Jordan in his twenty-sixth year of service, felt he still hadn't completed his mission.

There is no short-circuiting the amount of education, language training, and experience necessary for developing a *Fingerspitzengefühl* (intuition) for other cultures. Nor can the requisite foreign immersion be done in packs or classes and groups. This is why there is a real danger in notions like "culture-centric warfare" or the idea that with just a bit more cultural awareness training, soldiers can overcome their prejudices as well as be transformed into culturally literate strategic corporals. Without question, teaching everyone in uniform how to avoid cultural gaffes is important, just as knowing some phrases in the local language *will* help with building rapport. But to assume that any of this secures trust or will achieve fundamental sociocultural changes in the target populations is to misjudge how trust is earned in the non-West, never mind what it takes to undo social structures, people's fundamental attachments, or commitment to their identity. The only Americans

likely to earn lasting trust are individuals who can commit to the same life-long attachments locals do, and via the same methods, which is one reason we should want to invest heavily—but selectively—in individuals, and not be fooled into thinking our usual mass approach will suffice.

Not only is concentrating via individuals the only way to gain deep local knowledge, but it is also the only way to keep our footprint small. The catch is this is only likely to work in permissive environments, where strength in numbers and firepower don't matter as much as they do in combat zones. Where, exactly, counterinsurgency falls on the conflict continuum has never been either clear or static. Ergo, force structure issues have always been and will likely remain sticky. Still, small numbers of truly culture-centric individuals could provide the ideal stopgap. Everyone doesn't have to be deeply culturally aware or conversant in the local language so long as we have some individuals who are. The challenge would be to carefully select, assess, and assign only certain individuals to this capability, train everyone else to recognize their usefulness, and then institutionalize their use.

There are myriad reasons—financial, logistical, practical—to take a precision-oriented rather than broad-gauged, everyone-needs-to-be-culturally-fluent approach. Looming above all of them, however, are certain realities about us and our Americanness: cultural, let alone moral, relativism is hard to square with American values. It makes no sense to send young men and women off to fight for American values, then tell them to respect the values of people whose practices or beliefs can't be squared with ours. Nor are training and education particularly effective against faith-based convictions about what is or isn't immoral or abhorrent. In other words, it seems wholly unrealistic to expect most soldiers to remain anything but solipsists, especially when solipsism is what makes them not just good but exemplary Americans.

Solipsists, it should be noted, *can't* keep their footprint small. But nor are we likely to keep our footprint small when we engage in public diplomacy and strategic influence campaigns, something most self-proclaimed counterinsurgency experts promote. Pushing democracy or women's rights is hardly low profile. It also squarely pits our values and beliefs, no matter how much we dress them up as "universal human values," against others'. What this, in turn, signals is that we consider ourselves superior—hardly the right message in a hearts and minds context, but, ironically, absolutely ideal were we only willing to pull out all the stops for twenty-first-century conquest and Empire.

In a weird twist, then, our attraction to hearts and minds may represent the ultimate proof that we don't sufficiently understand our limitations, or

our past. Without question, hearts and minds buys critical force protection. That may, indeed, be what it does best. Otherwise, it represents a wholly Western concept, which in and of itself should suggest a means-ends-audience problem. Arguably, only if we understand how to disarticulate societies elsewhere are we likely to be able to prevail against non-Westerners who not only reject our advances but also seek our destruction. For this we need people with local-level expertise. Cultural sensitivity is hardly adequate. At the same time, the force applied may well have to be visceral—hitting people in their stomachs, not wooing them through their hearts.

Yet More Unsettling Questions

Counterinsurgency is clearly appealing on a number of counts: it alludes to limited war, holds out the promise that the clever application of ideas and strategic strikes can beat crude force, and implies that there is some sort of method that, if only we adhere to it, will bring us victory. Most of the proofs for this, however, come from counterfactual rather than actual history. That alone should raise concerns. Others should come from whether we are capable of the insight, foresight, patience, and practices counterinsurgency is said to demand.²⁰ Or to be blunter still, never mind whether counterinsurgency *might* work, can *we* make it work? It could be that we are too constrained by what does and doesn't come easily or naturally to us *as* Americans. As Americans we may not be able to put into practice what the theory demands.

One pressing task, then, should be to gauge what we organizationally and temperamentally can and cannot do. A second task is to hook this back to what we truly need to know—and who needs to know it—when confronting non-Western adversaries (insurgents or not), all of which begs much more thorough study of Western/non-Western encounters, ours as well as others'. We leap to too many easy conclusions based on too few cases. Even in the most advanced professional military education programs, officers are exposed to the same handful of examples again and again: Malaysia in the 1950s (not Malaysia in the 1980s); Vietnam (but only U.S. and occasionally French experiences in Vietnam, never Chinese experiences); El Salvador (again, from the American perspective). The pattern is too predictable: almost nothing is studied about lessons learned from the non-Western point of view, no doubt because this is harder to come by. But also, virtually no attempt is made to ask non-Westerners how they have conducted their own counterinsurgencies. Typically, Britain and the IRA, even Russia and Chechnya, attract attention. But why shouldn't India, Turkey, or Senegal as well?

Finally, given all the advantages today's non-Westerners have over their forebears, it seems imperative to begin asking a series of hard, potentially discomfiting questions, most of which should end in "then what?" If, for instance, a "war of ideas" coupled with precision killing won't change our adversaries' attachment to their own identity or their desire for autonomy, then what? If we can't figure out how to beat people whose grievance is that we have humiliated them—and continue to do so—then what? Or, if some struggles just aren't winnable by the rules we've said we'll play by, then what?

Notes

1. At least two sets of caveats are in order. I generalize to a far greater extent throughout this chapter than any anthropologist should, but space prevents me from citing all the cases relevant to the overall argument. Second, my intent is to be provocative rather than definitive. Much of the argument is drawn from a series of courses I teach in a program that awards master's degrees in Irregular Warfare to military officers, both U.S. and international. I continue to learn a tremendous amount from them and, as this chapter should make clear, we have far more to yet learn from our non-Western allies in particular.

2. Loren Baritz, *Backfire: Vietnam—The Myths that Made Us Fight, the Illusions that Helped Us Lose, the Legacy that Haunts Us Today* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985).

3. This chart is borrowed from work done by Anna Simons and David Tucker, and can be found in a report ("Improving Human Intelligence in the War on Terrorism: The Need for an Ethnographic Capability") submitted to the Office of Net Assessment/Office of the Secretary of Defense, December 2004.

4. See Arthur Quinn, *Hell with the Fire Out: A History of the Modoc War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997); Keith A. Murray, *The Modocs and Their War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959).

5. Frances Deng and M. W. Daly, *Bonds of Silk: the Human Factor in the British Administration of the Sudan* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1989).

6. As important as cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation are—and tremendous lip service is being paid throughout the Department of Defense today both to these aspects of 'cultural inintelligence' and the need to better understand our adversaries—what 'ethnographic intelligence' refers to is decidedly different. Ethnographic intelligence can only be put together by drilling into social relations and delving below patterns of association to map actual connections between people, frequency and content of interactions, etc.—all of which requires extensive time in place and training in ethnographic techniques.

7. See Anna Simons, "The Death of Conquest," *The National Interest*, Spring 2003.

8. People also fight for reputation and honor, which help *secure* security.
9. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1989 [1946]), p. 228.
10. Or, at the very least, they should act increasingly pro-American.
11. For a particularly striking example of this, see Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, *Mankiller: A Chief and her People* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1993).
12. Perhaps at some point in the future there will be some biogenetic way to specifically target—and incapacitate—individuals belonging to particular groups, though given intermarriages across groups, not even this would be neat, tidy, or conclusive.
13. Douglas Porch, *The Conquest of Morocco* (Knopf, 1983); *The Conquest of the Sahara* (Northbrook, Ill.: Fromm International, 1986).
14. William Hoisington Jr., *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 205.
15. Richard Dunlop, *Donovan: America's Master Spy* (New York: Rand McNally, 1982), p. 505.
16. Guerrilla tactics adopted during the Civil War likewise involved scorching the earth—tactics practiced by Stonewall Jackson, George Crook, and William Sherman, among others.
17. Robert Kaplan, as well as proponents of 4th Generation Warfare, has recently made such claims. See Robert Kaplan, "Indian Country," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2004, p. 22.
18. While waging a war of attrition against anything but tanks won't play in the world today, this is something that could certainly change with further terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.
19. For more on SOF status hierarchies, see Anna Simons and David Tucker, "United States Special Operations Forces and the War on Terrorism," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Spring 2003.
20. See, for instance, James Fallows, "Getting Out Right," *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 2005.

NINETEEN

A "Post-Hostilities" Moment?

MICHAEL VLAHOS

As it is used today in the American defense world, the term *post-hostilities*—or "post-conflict," or "stabilization and reconstruction operations"—seems to have meaning that is intuitively obvious and self-evident. But the term's meaning, in contrast, is actually sublime, going to the very heart of war and the American ethos.

In Old Norse the term *post-hostilities* would be called a *kenning*. Viking poetry liked to substitute a metaphorical phrase for a noun, so that a battle would be signaled by "a storm of swords." But what exactly does the "post-hostilities *kenning*" mean?

Before we can understand its full sublimity, we should know how it came to be. Thus, a story is in order—even if some might find it iconoclastic or, worse, schismatic.

How "Post-Hostilities" Came to Be

It was like an ancient fetish, to be sure. You had only to hold the plastic three-ring binder in your hands to feel its talismanic powers. First of all, it had heft: it was thick plastic with that unforgettable 1970s' smell, and it was emblazoned with the new camo scheme. Forest camouflage. European camouflage.

Vietnam was behind us. A new age had begun. Here, with the special authority that hope brings to determined new enterprise, was its sacred text. Field Manual 100-5: "Operations."¹

No more COIN, no more JKF School, no more Phoenix Program or MACVSOG. The new "Operations" was peppered with reassuring pictographs